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ABSTRACT

A survey was made of 107 fathers of boys aged 11 and 12 competing in the Pee Wee Level Division III of the Connecticut State Ice Hockey Tournament. The questionnaire was designed to examine the career aspirations of the fathers for their sons in ice hockey, and to determine their attitudes toward their son's participation in the sport as it relates to future ambitions. The majority of the fathers were college graduates with upper level professional or business careers, and of predominantly middle or upper middle class standing. Most hoped that their sons would play high school and college hockey. While some of the fathers voiced a hope that their sons would play professional hockey, this aspiration was recognized as unrealistic. Every father wanted his son to attend college, and eighty-one percent of the fathers stated that academic achievement was more important to them for their sons than social or sports achievement. Ninety-three percent felt that participation in a competitive sport would help their son's career. A comparison is made between this survey and several Canadian surveys which revealed that the majority of young ice hockey players in Canada are of lower socioeconomic status and have higher aspirations to become professional ice hockey players. (JD)

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FATHERS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS FOR SONS IN COMPETITIVE ICE HOCKEY PROGRAMS

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Years ago children's games or sports were informal. Boys gathered together in warm weather to play sandlot baseball or in winter to play ice hockey on the local ponds. Games were organized primarily for the purpose of having fun. Today children's games have become more and more highly structured. Adults now organize and direct most sports programs for children from Little League Baseball to Youth Hockey. These programs have come to mirror professional teams. Each team has at least one coach and manager and plays an official game schedule. Boys on the team wear team uniforms and often the outcome of team games are written up on the local papers. Boys at an early age are given much prestige for being an athlete and parents often bask in vicarious prestige. Having a son who is an athlete has become a status symbol for many middle class as well as lower class parents.

These changes in youth sports reflect changes that have also taken place in professional sports. Today the successful professional athlete is able to command salaries equal to or greater than those given to top executives in corporations. In addition, because they now have greater exposure through the media, they have become public celebrities. Their product endorsement income often exceeds their salaries. In the past when professional athletes retired, they usually disappeared from the public eye and often found it difficult to adjust to other types of employment. Today this has changed. Many retired athletes remain in the public eye as TV newscasters, corporate executives, and politicians. An athletic career today is no longer seen as a brief one.

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In the past a professional sports career was thought of as a lower class opportunity structure and not held in high regard by upper social classes. Lower class youth often placed more emphasis on sports achievement than on academic achievement as a vehicle for social mobility. In many respects the two in the past were seen as incompatible. Lower class youth often went from high school into a sports career just as middle class youth often went on to college. Today for some sports a college education is a necessity in that football and basketball players are recruited from the top college teams. Although this has not been the case with hockey, the members of the U.S. Hockey Olympic team were almost all recruited from colleges and several of these men went on to professional hockey careers.

Athletic scholarships to college today are fairly prevalent and many parents both middle and lower class now see athletics as a means to paying for the son's education. The upper class emphasis on sports solely for character development has been eroded to be replaced by the new emphasis on athletics as an edge for college entrance and scholarships.

Youth hockey teams in Connecticut reflect these changes. The emphasis has shifted from children organizing games for fun to adults measuring the success of a program by the number of games won. Today status for a hockey team revolves around having a good season, so that the team can play in the state tournament at Division I, II or III levels. Winning trophies now becomes a goal.

The dominant themes of the various youth hockey organizations' programs still emphasize the intrinsic aspects of the game, that hockey molds and develops character in boys. Character is thought of in terms of such attributes as sportsmanship, self-discipline,

teamwork, competitiveness and respect for authority. However, the organizational flyers also have printed on them the State Tournaments the various age levels have won. In practice, coaches and parents seem more concerned with extrinsic rewards of winning games, tournaments and qualifying for college scholarships.

In light of these changes, this research is designed to examine fathers' career aspirations for their sons in competitive ice hockey programs and to determine if aspirations vary by social class. Comparisons of fathers' of different educational, occupational and socioeconomic levels were made. There is little research on fathers' aspirations for sons in ice hockey programs and most research on hockey has been with Canadian youth hockey groups.

Hockey in Connecticut is different in many respects from that in Canada. In Connecticut hockey games are dependent on artificial ice, since Connecticut winters are upredictable. Rinks in Connecticut are all private and there is no state support. Therefore, hockey is an expensive participant sport. Because of this, participation may be mainly of middle class rather than lower class boys as in Canada.

The season ice time in Connecticut costs approximately $250 per player or more. This fee doesn't include expenses for team shirts, equipment and travel. Games are often played in all parts of the state and a team usually averages a 40 game season. Therefore, not only must parents make a financial commitment, but also one of time since they must drive their children to games.

The Connecticut situation is probably very different from the Canadian one described by Vaz (1980). He states that the majority

of boys in youth hockey in Canada come from lower socio-economic levels and few of these boys will consider a college education. Vaz (1980, p. 147) further states in terms of aspirations of boys for a hockey career that "a career will likely fall within the range of preferred occupational choices of working-class boys, but not of those from higher socioeconomic strata."

In Connecticut today, the state recognizes 34 sports and scholarships at various colleges are available in all of these. Therefore, a college education and playing college hockey may be a compatible goal for both middle and lower class youth. However, because of the financial commitment necessary at the youth hockey level, one would expect that lower class parents who let their sons participate may see ice hockey as offering more opportunities to their sons than middle class parents. Opportunities might be seen as in terms of advantages in being admitted to college, getting a scholarship and later recruitment into professional hockey.

Another variable that might be related to expectations is fathers' involvement in the youth hockey program. One would expect that the more involved a father is in the program the more apt the parent is to stress the advantages of participation in ice hockey for the child. One might also expect that fathers involved in the hockey organization will have higher expectations for their sons to play high school, college and professional hockey than those not involved in the program.

McPherson (1978, p. 282) hypothesized that one reason parents become involved in organized youth sports was "to facilitate the attainment of career aspirations they may hold for their child in either college, professional or elite amateur sports."

This research was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Do career aspirations of fathers for their sons vary by educational, occupational and SES levels? Specifically, do more lower echelon than upper echelon fathers hope their sons will play high school, college and professional hockey?

2. Do more fathers from upper educational, occupational and SES levels than from lower levels believe that a son's having played hockey will be an advantage in a business career?

3. Do more fathers from upper educational, occupational, and SES levels than from lower levels place more emphasis on academic than sports or social achievement for their sons?

4. Do fathers who are active in hockey organizations have higher hockey career aspirations for their sons than those not involved in the organizations?

Method:

Data was gathered from an anonymous questionnaire and from conversations with fathers who had sons competing in the Pee Wee Level Division III Connecticut State Tournament. The Pee Wee division is comprised of boys ages 11 through 12 years. All fathers of participants were asked to fill out questionnaires. No one refused to participate. However, some boys' fathers were deceased, divorced or unable to attend the tournament and therefore, responses were collected from 107 fathers. These fathers were from various parts of Connecticut since the top ten teams at this level were invited to the tournament. The data was gathered in March, 1981.

The majority of fathers in the sample were college graduates with upper level professional or business careers. They were predominantly of middle or upper middle class standing.

Socioeconomic standing was measured by Hollingshead's (1957) two factor index based on fathers' educational and occupational levels.

Specifically, the background characteristics of fathers in this sample were as follows:

Table 1

Educational Attainment

(1)	Graduate degree	(27)	25%
(2)	College degree	(44)	41%
(3)	Some college	(22)	21%
(4)	High school or less	(14)	13%
	Total	(107)	100%

Table 2

Occupational Levels

(1)	Higher Executives, Major Professionals and Owners of Large Concerns	(29)	28%
(2)	Business Managers, Lesser Professionals and Owners of Medium Concerns	(25)	24%
(3)	Administrative Personnel, Minor Professionals and Owners of Small Businesses	(27)	26%
(4)	Clerical and Sales Workers, Technicians and Owners of Little Businesses	(10)	10%
(5)	Skilled Manual Workers	(12)	12%
(6)	Machine Operators and Semi-skilled Employees	(1)	1%
(7)	Unskilled Workers	(0)	0%
	Total	(104)	100%

Table 3

Hollingshead's SES Levels from Highest to Lowest

(1)	(23)	22%
(2)	(45)	43%
(3)	(28)	27%
(4)	(8)	8%
(5)	(0)	0
Total	(104)	100%

Three fathers in the sample were unclassifiable as to occupational and SES levels.

Based on the social background characteristics of the fathers, the majority of boys come from upper rather than lower socioeconomic status levels in Connecticut. This stands in sharp contract to Vaz's (1980, p. 147) findings that the majority of boys in youth hockey in Canada come from lower socioeconomic levels.

Research Findings:

Fathers' hockey aspirations for their sons were found to be exceptionally high. 97% of fathers hoped that their sons would play high school hockey. Although this number at first appears extremely high, it may not represent an unrealistic goal in that in Connecticut there are a relatively small number of youth hockey organizations and each of these organizations draws boys from several towns. At the same time, most high schools have varsity hockey teams. Therefore, there is a good possibility that if these boys continue in competitive hockey that they will be able to play in high school.

86% of fathers stated that they hoped that their sons would play college hockey. How realistic this goal is, is difficult to judge. The number of colleges with hockey teams is concentrated in certain areas of the country. Further, this goal presupposes that at least 86% of these boys will go on to college

Interestingly enough, all of the fathers in the sample, 100%, said that they wanted their sons to go to college. Again the response of these Connecticut fathers stands in sharp contrast to the Canadian situation. Vaz (1980, p. 148) stated that few if

any boys in youth hockey in Canada would consider a college education. The Canadian situation may preclude realistically the possibility of pursuing a professional hockey career and a college education. Data by King and Angi (1968, p. 36) of Ontario Hockey Association players suggests that by grade 12, hockey players when compared with non-hockey players have: (1) lower average grades, (2) lower standardized test scores, (3) lower ratings by teachers on the factors "reliability," "cooperation" and "chance of success in grade 13."

For these Connecticut fathers, in general, regardless of social class background, the educational achievement of their sons was considered very important. When fathers were asked to rank in order of importance, which of the three: sports, academic or social achievement, they considered most important for their sons, 81% ranked academic achievement first and 83% ranked sports achievement third.

Aspirations for a college education for their sons apparently doesn't preclude the goal of a professional career. 31% of the fathers stated that they hoped that their sons would play professional hockey. This statistic seems extremely high and rather unrealistic when one considers what opportunities are available at the professional level. As McPherson (1978, p. 231) stated in terms of Canadian hockey, there are over 400,000 boys playing minor hockey in Canada and only 300 to 500 positions available in professional hockey. Based on this alone, the competition for an American boy is enormous.

The finding that 100% of Connecticut fathers want their sons to get a college education and almost a third of them also have hopes that their sons will pursue a professional hockey career is

fascinating. This is especially true since most boys who have gone into a career in hockey have gone directly from high school. Part of this belief that pursuing a college and hockey career are not necessarily incompatible may be the result of the U.S. Olympic Hockey Team experience. Most of the boys on the U.S. team had been enrolled in college and several of these went into professional hockey.

One father with whom I spoke, may have touched on the reason for this seeming ambiguity between educational goals and pro hockey goals when he stated: "I'm realistic, but I bet a lot put down they hope their son will be NHL." He, too, seemed to have an aspiration for his son to play NHL, but accepted this as being a remote possibility.

As these statistics indicate, many fathers hope that their sons will play college hockey and maybe even pro hockey. However, these fathers are realistic in stressing academic achievement first. A sports career will now be an option, but not a necessity.

College at this stage appears to be a realistic goal for most of these boys based on their grades. 61% of the boys had above average grades according to their fathers, 36% average and only 4% below average. As fifth and sixth grade students, the majority are good students.

Although no significant differences were found between fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels and aspirations that their sons play high school or college hockey, significant differences were found in regard to expectations that their sons' skating ability would help them to be admitted to college, to get a college scholarship and to the possibility of playing professional hockey. Table 4 below indicates the percent of fathers from each educational level that

said, yes, to questions asking if they thought their sons' hockey participation would be an advantage in being admitted to college, to getting a college scholarship and to the possibility of a hockey career.

Table 4

Percent of Fathers from Difference Educational Levels that Agreed that Hockey Offers Advantages

	Educational Levels	Graduate Degrees		College Degrees		Some College		High School or Less	
Advantages for	Getting into College	(13)	52%	(28)	64%	(17)	77%	(10)	71%
	Getting Scholarship	(7)	28%	(20)	47%	(12)	60%	(7)	54%
	Professional Career	(2)	8%	(14)	33%	(9)	45%	(7)	50%

19% more fathers with a high school or less education compared to fathers with a graduate degree thought that their sons' hockey ability would be an advantage in getting accepted into college. However, the majority of fathers regardless of educational level thought their sons' hockey ability would help them to be admitted to college.

The greatest differential by educational level was found when fathers were asked about whether they hoped that their sons would play professional hockey. There was a 42% difference by educational level. Only 8% of fathers with graduate degrees said, yes; whereas 50% of fathers with a high or less education said, yes.

Similar differences were also found by fathers' occupational and SES levels. The lower the occupational level of the father, the greater the percent that thought ice hockey would help their sons get into college, get a scholarship or have a hockey career. The differences between the highest and lowest occupational levels for

each were: 26%, 23%, and 46% respectively. (See Table 5)

Table 5

Percent of Fathers from Different Occupational Levels that Agreed that Hockey Offers Advantages

	Occupational Levels*	1	2	3	4-6
Advantages for	Getting into College	(13) 48%	(16) 64%	(19) 70%	(17) 74%
	Getting Scholarship	(8) 29%	(11) 48%	(13) 50%	(11) 52%
	Professional Career	(3) 11%	(6) 25%	(8) 33%	(11) 57%

Fathers' SES levels were inversely correlated with perceptions of advantages to be gained from ice hockey participation. The greatest difference was found in terms of the hope that their son would play professional hockey. Only 5% of fathers from the highest SES level (1) indicated that they would want their son to play professional hockey. Over half, 57%, of lower SES level fathers expressed this desire. (See Table 6)

Table 6

Percent of Fathers from Different SES Levels that Agreed that Hockey Offers Advantages

	SES Levels**	1	2	3-4
Advantages for	Getting into College	(11) 52%	(28) 62%	(26) 72%
	Getting Scholarship	(5) 24%	(20) 46%	(18) 55%
	Professional Career	(1) 5%	(15) 34%	(14) 41%

*See Table 2 for listing of Hollingshead's SES levels.
**See Table 3 for listing of Hollingshead's SES levels.

Table 7

Fathers' Education Level and Importance of Teamwork

	Education Level	Graduate Degree		College Degree		Some College		HS or Less	
Teamwork Important	Yes	(22)	82%	(34)	77%	(11)	50%	(9)	64%
	No	(5)	19%	(10)	23%	(11)	50%	(5)	35%
		(27)	100%	(44)	100%	(22)	100%	(14)	100%

n = 107

Table 8

Fathers' Occupational Level and Importance of Teamwork

	Occupational Level	1		2		3		4-6	
Teamwork Important	Yes	(26)	90%	(19)	76%	(14)	52%	(8)	35%
	No	(3)	10%	(6)	24%	(13)	48%	(15)	65%
		(29)	100%	(25)	100%	(27)	100%	(23)	100%

n = 104

Table 9

Fathers' SES and Importance of Teamwork

	SES Level	1		2		3-4	
Teamwork Important	Yes	(19)	83%	(35)	78%	(20)	56%
	No	(4)	17%	(10)	22%	(16)	44%
		(23)	100%	(45)	100%	(36)	100%

n = 104

Although fathers were not asked to specify why teamwork or cooperation was an important attribute to develop, the reason why upper level fathers may have stressed it more than those from lower levels may be that the majority of upper educational, occupational and SES level fathers worked for large corporations. Corporate values stress the value of teamwork. This would be an area to explore in greater depth in future research.

Another variable that was hypothesized to be related to hockey career aspirations was whether or not the boy's father was active in the hockey organization. It was hypothesized that fathers who were actively involved in the organization would evaluate the ice hockey program as being more beneficial for a boy's development than would those fathers not involved in the program. More fathers active in the organization than those not active hope that their sons will play high school, college and professional hockey. (See Table 10)

Table 10

Hockey Organization Involvement and Percent Hoping Son will Play Hockey at Various Levels

Father in Organization		Yes	No
Hope Son Will Play	High School	(57) 100%	(43) 94%
	College	(51) 93%	(36) 78%
	Professional Hockey	(21) 38%	(11) 24%

More fathers in the organization than those not in the organization also feel that their son's hockey experience will help him to get a scholarship to college, and will be advantageous for a business career. (See Tables 11-12)

Table 11

Fathers in Hockey Organization and Percent Believing Son May Get a Scholarship

	Fathers in Hockey Organization	Yes		No	
Scholarship	Yes	(27)	50%	(18)	39%
	No	(27)	50%	(28)	61%
		(54)	100%	(46)	100%

n = 100

Table 12

Fathers' Involvement in Hockey Organization and Beliefs That Competitive Sports Offer Advantage in Business

	Fathers in Hockey Organization	Yes		No	
Business Advantage	Yes	(55)	97%	(42)	88%
	No	(2)	4%	(6)	13%
		(50)	100%	(48)	100

n = 105

Both social background factors and fathers's involvement in the youth hockey organization were correlated with fathers' career aspirations for their sons. The two factors had an additive effect.

There was no real difference in involvement in hockey organization by fathers' educational, occupational or SES levels. An approximately equal proportion of fathers from all levels were involved. For example, 52% of fathers with a graduate degree, 59% with a college degree, 52% with some college and 50% with a high school or less education said that they were active in their son's hockey organization.

Conclusions:

Fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels were inversely correlated with expectations that their son's skating ability would help him to be admitted to college to get a college scholarship and possibly to play professional hockey. No correlation was found between fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels and expectations for their sons to play high school hockey or college hockey. This was because almost all of the fathers in the sample had these expectations for their sons. 97% of fathers hoped that their sons will play high school hockey and 86% hope their sons will play college hockey.

Fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels were not correlated with differences in aspirations for educational achievement. Every father in the sample, regardless of social background, wanted his son to attend college. 81% of the fathers stated that academic achievement was more important to them for their sons than social or sports achievement. In fact, of the three, 83% ranked sports achievement as third.

A sports career will be a possible option for these boys, but not a necessity. Based on fathers' expectations their sons will have an education to rely on for preparation for a business career. Although career aspirations are probably unrealistically high, the

the possible "fantasy" of a professional hockey career is realistically hedged by aspirations for a college education even among those 31% of fathers that hoped that their sons will have a professional hockey career.

More fathers active in youth hockey organizations than those not active hope their sons will play high school, college and professional hockey. Of the 55% who said that they were active, no differences in participation levels were found by SES levels. Participation in hockey programs was democratically spread among fathers at all social class levels.

Although it was expected that fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels would be related to perceptions of participation in competitive sports being an advantage in business careers, no significant differences were found. There was almost universal agreement, 93%, that a boy has an advantage in business if he has played competitive sports.

There was, however, a positive correlation between fathers' educational, occupational and SES levels and the belief that teamwork or cooperation is one of the most important attributes a boy learns from playing competitive sports. Although fathers were not specifically asked why they considered teamwork important, it should be noted that the majority of upper level fathers worked for large corporations. Corporations place a high value on teamwork.

All of the fathers in the sample consider their sons' participation in competitive ice hockey as a serious commitment. This can be seen both from fathers' aspirations for their sons and the child's level of involvement in youth hockey.

Of the 107 boys in the sample, the mean age they started skating in an organized hockey program was age 6 1/2. Many fathers stated that their sons actually learned to skate even earlier. Further 70% of fathers planned on sending their sons to summer hockey camp.

Hockey participation involves a total family commitment as well as a financial one. During the winter season, the average travel team plays 40 or more games about half of which are away in other parts of Connecticut and sometimes in New York, New Jersey or Massachusetts. This means that during the winter most boys' families spend every weekend watching him play.

The financial expenditure is also high. An estimate of regular season ice time is approximately $250 per boy plus travel expenses. Participation can easily amount to a total of $400 or more for the regular season. Summer hockey camps cost approximately $200 for two weeks of day camp and $400 for two weeks of overnight.

It is, therefore, probably understandable that the majority of boys in the sample were from upper rather than lower socioeconomic levels. Based on the findings of this research, it appears that many parents are hopeful that this experience will give their sons advantages in being admitted to college, getting scholarships and in future careers.

Suggestions for Future Research:

It would be interesting to determine how realistic these fathers' aspirations are. A longitudinal study of boys in youth hockey programs to determine what percent of participants actually play high school, college and professional hockey and what percent get scholarships would be useful.

Another comparison that would be informative would be to compare

mothers', fathers', and sons' and daughters' attitudes in regard to youth hockey. Do many wives feel left out or that hockey interfers with family life? Do sisters feel that they are relegated to a secondary status in relation to their brothers?

FOOTNOTES

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